
Using Satellite Teleconferencing

by Michael A. Jones, Bruce I. Wolford, and F.M. Porpotage II

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) uses satellite telecommunications to effectively and efficiently disseminate training and information to diverse juvenile justice constituencies. This article presents an overview of distance technology, reviews OJJDP's successes, and outlines the steps interested parties should take to participate in future broadcasts or to sponsor their own.

Satellite teleconferencing is a cost-effective means of delivering training and information to people who live in geographically diverse areas that may limit their access to such information. During the past 5 years, a series of studies, numerous books, and other reports have examined the rapidly expanding field of telecommunication technology and its application to training and information dissemination.

A fundamental issue at the core of technology-based training is the changing nature of today's professional world. Evidence suggests that the United States' work force is entering a time when the training that workers receive will become obsolete within 3 to 5 years. Limited funds and time, great distances, and other constraints will create a strong demand for more efficient, expedient ways to disseminate information (Chute, Hancock, and Balthazar, 1991).

Distance Training

The concept of distance training is expanding the definitions of how individuals learn, where they learn, and who teaches them (U.S. Congress, 1989). Distance training has become increasingly sophisticated since the time of the first educational radio programs. Barker (1989) used distance training as a catchall phrase to describe any form of instruction in which the learner and instructor were separated geographically and linked via telecommunication systems that permitted live, interactive audio and/or video exchanges.

Applications of distance training have increased dramatically during the past decade. In 1988, fewer than 10 States were promoting distance training (U.S. Congress, 1989). Today, all States do. The quality of distance learning has been recognized with increasing respect and

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credibility (Turnbull, 1988). Many trainers in the United States subscribe to the philosophy that the only difference between distance training and conventional training is the delivery mechanism, not the structure (Zigerell, 1984).

The motivation for distance training is a practical one. Training people where they are is more efficient than transporting them to the trainer. In addition to enhancing productivity, distance training enables OJJDP to reach line staff who otherwise might be excluded from national training opportunities. Distance training effectively uses qualified trainers who do not need to travel across the country to deliver a simultaneous, consistent message to thousands of professionals.

The traditional training paradigm, which requires the instructor and student to occupy the same classroom, has been challenged by technological advances. These advances can duplicate the benefit of traditional training with the flexibility and individualization of self-directed learning. No longer are the instructor and learner confined to the same classroom. With existing technology, the instructor can communicate information to a limitless number of classrooms.

As fiber-optic cables expand across America, computer-based technologies are becoming easier to access and more readily available. However, until a fiber-optic system is widely implemented, this medium will not be the preferred delivery mechanism for disseminating training or information to large, geographically diverse audiences.

Satellite teleconferencing is widely used by business, industry, and government agencies to deliver training and information to staff and constituencies around the world. This popular training tool requires only a steerable satellite dish and a television to access broadcast signals and a telephone for participants to use while interacting with panelists during call-in segments.

Regardless of the medium or approach used, training and education programs must engage the learner, identify clear instructional objectives, and use alternate instructional strategies to be successful. Distance training will not replace face-to-face instruction any more than use of the VCR as an educational aid has eliminated the role of the classroom teacher. It is simply another instructional tool.

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Delivery Systems

The array of distance delivery systems changes with each new technological advance. Currently, the most popular delivery systems are computer-based (for example, two-way video and the Internet) or satellite-based (satellite teleconferencing).

Satellite Teleconferencing

Since 1992, OJJDP has funded the Juvenile Justice Telecommunications Assistance Project (JJTAP) at Eastern Kentucky University to train and inform a geographically diverse juvenile justice constituency using satellite teleconferencing. (See table 1.) This technology has become an integral part of OJJDP's continuing efforts to disseminate information across the Nation in a timely fashion. Juvenile justice, education, and child welfare professionals, policymakers, and the public have watched national telecasts on issues such as confinement in

juvenile corrections and detention facilities; community collaboration; effective programs for serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders; youth-oriented community policing; juvenile boot camps; and conflict resolution for youth.

As these telecasts have demonstrated, satellite-delivered teleconferences are most effective when they introduce general topics that interest large numbers of participants in many locations. Supported by OJJDP research reports and publications, these satellite broadcasts are similar in quality to a news program or documentary.

Engaging the Community

The purpose of education and training is to change behavior. Long-term changes that affect communities and youth occur at the local level. Recognizing the local focus of juvenile justice and prevention, OJJDP uses satellite teleconferencing to strengthen and support community efforts to address current pressing issues.

Satellite teleconferencing can be a national catalyst for local, regional, and State examination of OJJDP initiatives and research. The low cost per participant of broadcasting a national teleconference to a large audience makes the medium an extremely cost-effective delivery mechanism. Furthermore, large numbers of participants who rarely attend national conferences now have a means of receiving timely information on juvenile justice and delinquency prevention issues.

Evaluation

Independent evaluations of teleconferences consistently yield positive feedback

Table 1

OJJDP Teleconferences

Topics	Number of Viewing Sites*	Approximate Number of Viewers
Conditions of Confinement in Juvenile Corrections and Detention Facilities (9/93)	165	4,950
Community Collaboration (6/95)	175	5,250
Effective Programs for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (10/95)	162	4,860
Youth-Oriented Community Policing (12/95)	183	5,490
Juvenile Boot Camps (2/96)	288	8,640
Conflict Resolution for Youth (5/96)	485	14,550
Reducing Youth Gun Violence (9/96)	271	8,130
Total	1,729	51,870

Videos of each OJJDP satellite teleconference can be obtained for a nominal fee from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 800-638-8736.

**The Law Enforcement Television Network and local cable television providers sometimes provided their members with a simultaneous broadcast of OJJDP teleconferences. Those sites may not be reflected in the totals.*

from juvenile justice professionals. On average, more than 90 percent of viewers responding to a survey instrument indicate that the content of OJJDP teleconferences successfully addresses critical issues affecting their professional responsibilities; that panelists provide useful, understandable information; and that new ideas presented during the teleconferences are used to modify or implement programs. In addition, 90 to 95 percent of viewers compliment the effectiveness of the medium, and more than 95 percent support its future use for training and disseminating information.

Generating Community Participation

One of the most tangible benefits of participating in a teleconference is the local discussion and action that follow a telecast. You can attract a local audience to a national teleconference by:

- ◆ Identifying key stakeholders in the community or jurisdiction who have an interest in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention.
- ◆ Establishing contacts with members of each stakeholder group.
- ◆ Disseminating information about the teleconference through your stakeholder contacts.

The personal touch works. If you know colleagues who should participate, call them.

However, participants who report the greatest benefits from teleconferences participate in pre- and post-broadcast activities that give them an opportunity to discuss local issues, concerns, and applications of the information they have received. The benefits of teleconferences can readily be summed up by the old saying: “The more you put into something, the more you get out of it.”

Facilitation improves the overall operation of a teleconference and enhances the participants’ discussion and learning. Quality facilitation, like quality training, results from planning and preparation.

Select an effective local facilitator who has the time to review the preconference materials and handouts prior to the telecast. Work with the facilitator to plan local activities before and after the telecast that will encourage further discussion of the issues presented. Consider developing local questions, organizing a discussion panel of experts, or dividing the participants into smaller discussion groups that report their observations to the reassembled audience.

Remember that the telecast has been designed as a catalyst for local action. Effective facilitation will ensure your teleconference’s success.

Access

With the growth of downlink sites, satellite teleconferences are becoming more accessible. Many government agencies and organizations are installing downlinks. If you do not own a satellite dish, you can probably arrange to use one. Although registration for OJJDP satellite teleconferences is free, each site may incur some expense in securing the services of a downlink site. Fees vary widely, and you are encouraged to be a conscientious consumer.

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As you assemble the audience, collect local information on the topic. Because the teleconference will examine national data with selected regional applications, you should have information about the issues facing your community available for local participants. If time and resources permit, consider making the teleconference the centerpiece of a local forum or training initiative.

Facilitation

The most successful telecasts are supported by active facilitation at the downlink sites. Hosting a teleconference requires little more than tuning the satellite dish to the proper coordinates, turning on the television, and opening the door.

To find a local viewing site, first check government agencies. Within the Federal Government, the largest number of satellite downlinks are operated by the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Veterans Affairs (especially its medical facilities), the U.S. Postal Service, and the Social Security Administration. (The Internal Revenue Service has a large network of dishes, but they are difficult to operate because they are locked onto a single satellite. Department of Defense satellite facilities are also extensive but less accessible.) Other Federal agencies that have their own networks include the Federal Aviation Administration, the U.S. Customs Service, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Most Federal agencies offer their facilities to other Government agencies free of charge if the downlink is not being used on the day of the broadcast.

In addition, State and local governments are installing dishes at an accelerated rate. Check with these agencies for the availability and times of their viewing sites. If government facilities are not available, contact local community colleges, universities, and schools. Educational institutions often charge a fee that ranges from a few dollars to several hundred dollars per hour. Other alternatives include police and fire stations, local hotels, and satellite-dish rental firms. (Rental opportunities are listed in the phone directory.) Even in rural areas, you may find videoconference facilities within a reasonable distance if you search diligently.

Once your agency has been added to the Juvenile Justice Telecommunications Assistance Project database, you will be notified of all future OJJDP teleconferences. To participate in an OJJDP teleconference, you must register a site. After your registration has been processed, the

site coordinator will receive a master participant resource packet. The site coordinator also will receive a facilitator's guide that outlines the tasks necessary for a successful event and a technical guide that lists the program's broadcast coordinates.

Sponsoring a Teleconference

OJJDP encourages juvenile justice agencies and organizations to consider using satellite teleconferences to disseminate research from their projects. JJTAP has developed the *Teleconferencing Resource Manual* as a guide to downlinking, developing, and broadcasting programs. JJTAP staff and other experts in designing satellite teleconferences are available to help your agency take advantage of this promising medium.

Summary

As testimony to its commitment to provide a comprehensive strategy for juvenile justice, OJJDP uses state-of-the-art strategies to train and inform all levels of the juvenile justice, education, child welfare, and law enforcement communities about critical issues and research affecting America's youth. Although satellite teleconferencing is not the only

Previous OJJDP satellite teleconferences have attracted large audiences and received excellent evaluations. The potential for these events is virtually unlimited. Interested agencies or individuals who would like to participate in future OJJDP teleconferences or who require assistance in locating a satellite dish should contact the grantee office at Eastern Kentucky University, Training Resource Center, Telecommunications Assistance Project, 301 Perkins Building, Richmond, Kentucky 40475-3127; by phone at (606) 622-6270; by fax at (606) 622-2333; or by e-mail at njdadeh@aol.com. For information on downlinks in your community, consult the *Downlink Directory*.

method for accomplishing this task, its importance has been widely accepted by juvenile justice practitioners throughout the Nation.

You and your agency are strongly encouraged to use satellite broadcast technology and participate in future OJJDP-sponsored teleconferences. The savings realized by conserving resources and delivering a consistent message can be substantial.

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